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Whatever Happened to the Judo Throw? Fluxus and the Digital Gimmick

Natasha Lushetich

In martial arts, the "judo throw" is a move that doesn't block the opponent's attack or launch a counterattack. Instead, the judo throw uses the impetus of the opponent's attack to its own advantage. The expression has also been employed to describe the slippery way in which capital imperceptibly appropriates the social, the experiential, and the libidinal through mediation, fragmentation, and acceleration.[1] Yet, the neo-avant-garde appropriation of capitalist techniques of appropriation is the judo throw, too. The post-World War II productivist-consumerist society, in which Fluxus entered the cultural scene, reduced individuals to two kinds of heteronomy; both produced a brand of micro-violence embedded in routines and assignments of energy, a violence that appeared "as natural as the air around us."[2] The heteronomy of work forced people into systemic integration; the heteronomy of private consumption made the consumption of mass-produced commodities an unavoidable component of the productivist-consumerist regime. Neither could be separated from the commodification of what, after Walter Benjamin, is a two-pronged notion of experience: *Erfahrung*, the cumulative inter-generational experience in which "contents of the individual past combine in the memory with material from the collective past,"[3] and *Erlebnis*, the isolated, often intense, mostly subjective experience derived from fleeting sensations that do not "enter tradition."[4] The post-WWII neo-avant-garde vehemently contested the desecration of experience and the standardization of desire. The Situationist International thus practiced psychogeography—a rapid, improvised passage through an urban territory. Early Fluxus concerts showcased works like George Brecht's 1962 *Drip Music* that consisted of pouring water into a bucket from a ladder. The Fluxus *event scores*—performative-perceptual ready-mades framed by artistic perception—recoded *Erlebnis* by immersing the percipient-interactant in *ichi nen* or absolute absorption in as small and seemingly insignificant a fragment of reality as possible.[5] George Brecht's 1961 *Three Lamp Events* suggested: "On/Off. Lamp. Off/On."[6] Yoko Ono's 1963 *Laundry Piece* prompted: "In entertaining your guests, bring out your laundry of the day and explain to them about each item. How and when it became dirty and why."[7] Bengt af Klintberg's 1963 *Orange Event Number 8* (for Pi Lind) proposed: "Eat an orange as if it were an apple (Hold it, unpeeled, between forefinger, middle finger and thumb, bite big mouthfuls, etc.)."[8]

At the other end of the spectrum, Allan Kaprow's happenings made extensive use of everyday actions, such as spreading jam on toast, or having a domestic squabble. Happenings inflected the "hieratic" in "uninflected life."[9] Their explicit aim was to redeem the ritualistic dimension of life, destroyed by the capitalist metamorphosis of all cultural objects, from "religious iconography" to "*Das Kapital*" into "market value."[10] Happenings prompted a vertical *communitas*, which, unlike its horizontal variant, is a "mode of co-activity"[11] diametrically opposed to heteronomy, yet often found in traditional rituals that are the pillar of *Erfahrung*: wedding ceremonies, initiation rites, and funeral rites. Instead of ineffectually opposing a socio-economic system that had, by the 1960s, mastered the art of appropriation in many, if not most walks of life, the Situationists, Fluxus and Kaprow, among many other artists and movements, re-signified the existing cultural practices averring Renato Poggioli's claim that the legacy

of the avant-garde, and by extension, neo-avant-garde, resides not in a radical, *definitive* break with tradition but in its *re-purpose-ability*: in the re-use of avant-garde techniques in new art forms as well as, importantly, in everyday life.[12] Fluxus imaginatively re-coded avant-garde techniques for disrupting taken-for-granted experience by intersecting the legacy of the Dadaist chance operations with a judo-throw approach to commodification. For example, George Brecht's *Suitcase Ready for Travelling,* an event in the form of objects assembled in a suitcase in the late 1960s, prompted the interactant to take off in an unknown direction, and, upon arrival at the chance destination, behave in ways suggested by the provided objects and clothes. *Suitcase Ready for Traveling* implicitly critiqued the holiday, which became particularly popular in the productivist-consumerist era. In the 1950s, when it first appeared, the holiday was a form of "transcendence," an escape from the systematization and bureaucratization of industrial productivism, which is why it was imperative that the release from these strictures occur elsewhere, in a paradisiacal world of "otherness."[13] Similarly, at the cusp of the 1970s service economy, which superseded the commodity economy, Ken Friedman's "professional services" granted the artist the status of a "professional" who didn't sell artworks, but, instead, provided "services" to interested parties, such as manual, horticultural, administrative, affective or artistic services.[14]

But how might we, in the current epoch, think the production of experience in a (global) culture that has appropriated many Fluxus features: performativity, interactivity, and ready-made-tization?[15] The Fluxus work has always been a "matrix," a "structure" provided by the artist and further developed, or even entirely transformed by the interactant.[16] As a laboratory, Fluxus has been a "way to organise social networks" as well as "networks of people learning."[17] The reason why Fluxus appeared so current in the 1990s, amidst the proliferation of de-centralized digital networks, facilitated by peer-to-peer, group-to-group, and individual-to-group interaction is perhaps best summed up by Andreas Huyssen's question: Is Fluxus not the "master-code" of "what has come to be called postmodernism?"[18] Two and a half decades later, the utopistic vision of the Internet as a democratic space of freedom has irrevocably given way to a much grimmer reality: instrumentarianism.[19] Pre-corporation, which denotes the "pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes" where "[a]lternative" and "independent" no longer refer to "something *outside* mainstream consumerism" but are "*the* dominant styles within the mainstream culture,"[20] has replaced appropriation and incorporation. The formerly strange, potentially dangerous—or merely unpredictable—has, since the 1990s, been systematically standardized into marketable diversity. The micro-exploitation of *Erlebnis* and the displacement of *Erfahrung* into the realm of Disneyfied commercialism is inseparable from yet another form of pre-corporation, this time of aesthetic experience: the experience economy. Superseding the service economy in the late 1990s, the experience economy "experientializes the goods," or, as the authors of the eponymous book, Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, like to say, it "ings the thing,"[21] turning the commodity—Nike shoes, for example—into a spectacular experience such as play*ing* basketball with a laser projection of Michael Jordan or LeBron James. Trapping the consumer in a web of entertainment and escapism, the experience economy simultaneously Disneyfies *Erfahrung* by semantically and experientially linking objects, places, cultural heritage, symbolic meaning, and standardized fantasy worlds into branded communities based on shopping habits. As Paul Virilio and Franco Berardi have argued, the structural violence of over-standardization is additionally exacerbated by the digital velocity's "dictatorship" over cognitive agency.[22] While digital design aids the creation of an abstract, "fundamentally unsustainable world,"[23] digital platforms increasingly "solicit our engagement beneath the threshold of attention"[24] where nonchalant flicks, dabs,

and "likes" trigger the dopamine reaction in the brain inducing drive-based behavior.[25] For Byung-Chul Han, the current iteration of neoliberalism, which he terms "smartpolitics," enlists "liking" as a means to "anticipate" and "direct" human actions.[26] Echoing Jameson's famous description of postmodern experience as reduced to "pure material signifiers" and "unrelated presents in time,"[27] Han diagnoses the current temporal condition as the dictatorial "instantaneousness of non-time,"[28] which takes precedence over all other temporalities, as can be seen from the way people interrupt all other tasks to look at the latest message on their phone that has just gone 'pling!' The radical difference between the earlier diagnoses by Virilio and Berardi is that this tendency is given painful continuity—and a durable somatic inscription—in such syndromes as the "vibrating phone syndrome," the mobile phone user's hallucination of vibration when the mobile phone is not vibrating at all.[29] In digital neoliberalism, heteronomic control has given way to aggressive destabilization through relentless and violent, yet, for humans, largely ineffectual change that goes by the name of "systems optimization," not to mention tracking and dataveillance, all of which abuse freedom and deracinate knowledge, installing, in their place, radical ignorance and dysfunctionality.[30]

If de-centralized communication, the (digital) DIY spirit, and widespread cultural ready-made-tization, characteristic of the 21st century, form part of the legacy of the neo-avant-garde, more specifically, of Fluxus, whatever happened to the judo throw, that elegantly subversive tactic for re-enchanting experience? In this article, I focus on the digital gimmick, an ambivalent variation on the judo throw that re-codes the Fluxus practice of "putting into play."[31] For Jean Baudrillard, who first coined the expression in the context of an elaborate critique of capitalism, "putting into play," unlike "putting into value,"[32] is an exchange of fluxes and affects, a discharge of generosity, as well as a metamorphic economic, all of which are abundantly present in Fluxus intermedia: the *event score*, the Fluxkit, and Fluxsports.[33] The problem, however, is that during the historical Fluxus period[34] "putting into play" was very different from "putting into value," a goal-oriented strategy of investment (monetary or libidinal). Gimmickification, by contrast, like the judo throw before it, operates obliquely, rather than frontally. Following in the tradition of playbour,[35] it *fuses* play and value extraction. The digital gimmick effectively excavates practices sedimented *in* and *as* mainstream culture by 'riffing off' Fluxus intermedia and cuing cycles of transformation of energy and matter, object and performance, thought, word, and action. But before we go any further, let us take a closer look at:

The Gimmick

Defined as an "ingenious device, gadget or idea," "used to attract people's attention," "often to commercial purposes,"[36] the gimmick is usually associated with quick and temporary gain. Everyday examples range from engaging children in meaningful learning by manipulating the "ordinary into the realm of the extraordinary"[37] to the so-called scientific gimmicks, such as brain imaging, which furnish quick and, therefore, often faulty impressions.[38] Significantly, in the U.S., the use of the word "gimmick" dates to the 1920s, a time of "euphoria" as well as "radical disenchantment with industrial, commercial and financial capitalist techniques."[39] Reflecting the falling rates of profit that force the capitalist to devise ever-new ways to "squeeze increasingly small increments of surplus labor from workers in the immediate production process on which the entire system continues to depend,"[40] the gimmick reduces labor and cheapens value. Part and parcel of the ceaseless struggle for new sources of profit, programmed obsolescence, and aggressive systems' optimization, it is a capitalist device *par excellence:* both a one-off and endlessly repeatable, dynamic and static, cheap and titillating. The gimmick is also the perfect *Erlebnis*-inducing device, which,

instead of inventing something entirely new, cites or recycles the already existing, often with the means at hand, *bricoleur* style. For Jameson, artistic gimmicks (which differ from cultural gimmicks) rely on the citation of former art forms: conceptual art, serial art, *event scores*, and instructions. Unlike these art forms, however, Jameson's example of choice—Tom McCarthy's 2005 literary work *Remainder*—where a man who has suffered a head injury and lost his memory, pays others to re-create isolated fragments of his life so that he can re-experience them—re-appropriate the 1960s instructions, without "flex[ing] mental categories," or generating a new language.[41] Such works remain a "formal event"[42] in the sense that they appropriate neo-avant-garde moves as both content *and* form, as can be seen from Paul McCarthy's appropriations of his own 1970s radical abject art in the form of his 2014 *Chocolate Factory*—a real chocolate factory manufacturing miniature chocolate (edible) butt-plug-holding Santa Claus figures.[43] Or, Tracey Emin's tabloid-style confessions, such as the 2008 neon *People Like You Need to Fuck People Like Me*, or the 2012 *I Will Never Be a Mother But I Will Die Alone*, both of which rely on a complex tapestry of appropriation of oppositional, yet media-savvy, shocking, yet predictable subcultural practices like punk, the conceptual work of artists like Bruce Nauman, the legacy of the ready-made, and the feminist use of the 'traditionally feminine' materials—quilts and embroidery—by such artists as Suzanne Lacey, all encased in a pre-corporated, easily marketable, repeatable structure that toys with authenticity while communicating emotional truths in a tabloid-style, monosyllabic language. Although gimmicky, these works are by no means devoid of value. On the contrary, they may reduce the existing—'traditional', art-historical—value of the works they cite, yet they also create new semiocapitalist value. Semiocapitalism is a recombinant semiotic machine that deracinates habit and "floods the nervous system with information deluge" where "innovation" is inseparable from recombination and "re-signification."[44] Artists like McCarthy and Emin belong to a very different artistic lineage from Fluxus. They also use citing conventions to very precise semantic ends. The situation with the cultural, rather than the artistic gimmick—which is my focus here—is less clear-cut, embedded as it is not in personal intentions, but in the concretism[45] of the medium itself: its materiality, structure, and praxis.

The Structural Aspect of the Gimmick

A key feature of digital sociality is the appropriation of the oldest gimmick in history: the free gift, usually traced to the Trojan horse, a ploy employed by Greek soldiers, who, hiding in the horse's belly, entered the city of Troy and conquered it. Despite the fact that, in the current age, the reason why people 'fall' for the free gift could be attributed to a sense of entitlement cultivated by contemporary advertising strategies' assurances of deservedness, the free gift, abundantly used by the mobile telephony providers, dispels the dictatorship of instantaneousness[46] by creating an almost *archaeological connection* with the invisible, inter-temporal, and human-material ties. As a number of separate studies have shown,[47] the reason why people opt for an internet or telephony provider that offers the first three months of a two-year contract for free, then charges a considerably higher monthly fee than the provider that offers no free gift but charges a significantly lower monthly fee, is that the gift, as a relational and moral phenomenon, creates durable relationships based on tradition. Significantly, this occurs *regardless* of whether there is an *actual tradition* to fall back on or whether this 'tradition' is retroactively performatively inaugurated through citation. Slavoj Žižek provides a useful example of the performative working of citation. In a famous experiment by psychologist J.L. Beauvois, there are two groups of volunteers. One group is told that the experiment may involve something unpleasant or even unethical and offered the choice to withdraw. The other group is told nothing at all. Paradoxically, Beauvois's numerous iterations of the experiment have shown that the number of

'willing' participants remains exactly the same in both groups. Žižek argues that it is the *performative inauguration of choice* that makes the participants agree to the prospect of unpleasantness, or a breach of ethics, then retroactively rationalize this move as *their own free choice*. In this particular case, performativity can't be separated from the interpellative working of science as an institution, the professional status of the investigators, their mode of dress and address, all of which affirm the participants' view of themselves as rational individuals taking part in a scientifically and socially useful experiment.[48] In other words, interpellation here works *independently* of the investigators' or the participants' intentions. It's embedded in the situation. Similarly, the gift performatively erases the (purely formal) distinction between things and persons. It mobilizes reciprocity for the simple reason that things are not "inert objects" but were formerly considered a part of the family.[49] Like Beauvois's experiment, the gift is a socially interpellative situation. It interpellates without explicit intentions, through culturally sedimented, often imperceptible components, one example of which are the divinities. Lurking in the background of all exchange, the divinities stabilize time through temporal architectures made of promises, pledges, expectations, and projections, as can be seen from many traditional customs, such as those of the Sudanese Hausa, who, fearing the danger of illness during the corn harvest, make presents of this grain to the poor. The generative aspect of the gift—its capacity to *excavate* the less visible aspects of *Erfahrung*—is, in mobile telephony, framed in a manner that resembles Fluxus work. The best example is perhaps Mieko Shiomi's 1965 *Spatial Poem*, and its subsequent placement in the Fluxus Mail Order Warehouse catalogues.[50] *Spatial Poem* is a generic title for a series of texts-objects-actions Shiomi created by sending simple telegraphic instructions such as "open something and close it" or "disturb the natural wind which surrounds this globe" to potential participants.[51] Shiomi chartered the participants' responses onto a map of the world, either in the form of flags on a board, or printed texts and photographs. The simple instructions interpellated the participant to contribute to the artwork, which consisted of nothing else but the participants' contributions. Shiomi's *Spatial Poem* was, like many Fluxus works, included in the Fluxus Mail Order Warehouse catalogues; however, unlike other works, *Spatial Poem* could not be exchanged for money, only for objects. George Maciunas's re-contextualization of Shiomi's work within the barter system amplified the work's relational dimension, doubly accentuated by the framing of this ancient exchange system within a mail order catalogue, a symbol of consumer goods supply. The proposition to exchange *Spatial Poem*—a nexus of inter-temporal and inter-spatial social relations woven of words, actions, and objects—for objects, brought to the fore the 'pull' of social relationality embedded both in the gift and in the barter system, yet masked by the generalized equivalent or money. Much like the gift cues a social obligation with a very *specific* materiality and temporality, the barter system demands a thoughtful choice of the prospective 'partner's in exchange' (rather than buyer's) means of exchange. By framing *Spatial Poem* within the standard (monetary) system of economic exchange yet reverting to an archaic one, Maciunas accentuated the *sedimented bio-social mixing,* action-hood, temporality, and person-hood always already implied in any object.

Something very similar is at work in the standard binding mechanisms to mobile telephony, which is the x amount of free minutes and the x GB of free data that users feel obliged to use by making calls to people they would perhaps not normally make calls to and by interacting with the media content they would perhaps not normally interact with. While potentially beneficial, this gift of time, of pure duration, and the promise of connection and exhilaration, place the digital deluge and chronarchic strictures, characteristic of our times, in dialogue with the abovementioned, post-

WWII notion of the holiday. Resembling doodling in their looseness and sporadic repetitiveness when overheard on a commuter train or in an airport lounge, these micro-holidays have a ritualistic and, therefore, binding effect. Their relational pull is anchored not only to past but also to future biosocial sedimentations through sharing, linking, 'liking,' and networking (as well as producing vast amounts of harvestable and tradable data). These practices are not inter-material; rather, they are *inter-immaterial*, yet they create a sense of affectively sedimented continuity characteristic of *Erfahrung* and prompted by the gift, in which an echo of boundless divine time resounds.

Apart from reclaiming invisible relations and ties, much of the digital gimmickry reclaims psychosomatic grounded-ness through the size and scale of the object. The digital world is by default full of miniatures, from early-Internet abbreviations such as "prolly" for "probably" to digital avatars. The smartphone, too, is a miniature. Arguably, the smartphone is a "score"[52] traceable to Marcel Duchamp's 1935–40 *Boîte-en-valise*, a portable museum of Duchamp's artworks rendered as miniatures. It is also traceable to *Boîte-en-valise*'s Fluxus variant: the Fluxkit. An *event score* in the form of objects, assembled in cases no larger than a briefcase, and modeled on *Boîte-en-valise*, Fluxkits were mass-produced by Maciunas in the late 1960s and 1970s. As Brecht, whose 1961 *Repository* (a wall cabinet full of word puzzles, playing cards, toothbrushes, light bulbs, and thermostats) was another precursor to the Fluxkit, succinctly put it: "Every object is an event […] and every event has an object-like quality."[53] For example, Robert Watts' 1967 *Time Kit* prompted the percipient/interactant to a haptic and kinaesthetic exploration of time *as change* through objects that acted as performative scores for actions such as unrolling the tape measure, zipping and unzipping the zipper, inflating the balloon, or squeezing the compact lump of rubber. Similarly, Ay-O's 1964 *Finger Box,* fifteen square blocks of wood arranged in rows of three by five, each with a hole in the center, prompted the interactant to a tactile exploration of hidden textures that playfully confused the senses by placing sharp nails next to soft, furry surfaces. In similar fashion, the smartphone prompts multisensorial, semi-scripted, and semi-voluntary actions and interactions, albeit not in a *materially* but, rather, *immaterially* immersive manner. Like the Fluxkit, the smartphone layers mobile experience and anchors it to a portable device.

Miniaturization and portability also 'explode' the stratigraphy of experience.[54] Consider, for example, the much-used Nike+ smartphone application, designed as a motivational tool for running incarnated in the little running partner, which appears on the runner's mobile phone. Or, the miniature security officer in such games as Ian Bogost's Airport Security augmented reality game, designed to be played on one's mobile phone during the increasingly time-consuming airport security procedures, where, in order to alleviate stress, the passenger adopts the persona of a security officer, who, with the aid of the latest full-body scanning technology, searches other miniature passengers for such suspicious items as liquids and detonators. In addition to having an experientially unifying effect, miniaturized objects also have an affectively gratifying, experientially re-enchanting working. A clumsy miniature, such as a puppy, is endearing not only because it's vulnerable but because it reveals the genealogy of everyday dog behavior by performing everyday actions like walking and eating, ineptly. A more virtuoso miniature, like the Nike+ running partner, or the tiny security officer, entices appreciation in addition to harking back to a puppy's clumsiness. Although it could be argued that making things smaller aids acceleration, the micro-focusing of attention reveals the genealogical stratigraphy of the object and creates a *temporal expansion*. It reveals the folded nature of the world—the reflection of the macrocosm in the microcosm. It also alleviates the reductionism of the Heideggerian "world-as-picture"

kind where "all that is [the entire world]" is "reduced to a unified," but, ultimately, flat and "disenchanting image."[55] Moreover, miniatures such as Nike+ and Airport Security *inflect* the uninflected. Like the Fluxkit, they texture the everyday in a ludic way. Mobilizing game principles—rules, goals, the feedback loop—they stimulate generative, self-perpetuating continuity and flow.[56] The experience of flow, of effortless play, yet stability and competence, occurs when previous experiential sedimentations enter into a dialogue with spontaneity, chance, and alertness, creating a continuous feedback loop. This sedimentary-performative structure, characteristic of games, is a form of ritualized behavior, which is why games are, in fact, a collective tradition, inseparable from the experience-grounding *Erfahrung*. In addition to practices cued variously by design, gadgets, or performative creations of non-existent traditions, there are also more ephemeral features of the gimmick, such as rhythm.

The Ephemeral Aspect of the Gimmick

An important sphere of digital gimmickification is the revocation of the digital systems' automated-ness. Automation is, of course, synonymous with the digital ecosystem, where numerous invisible processes such as tracking and data harvesting work without human intervention, while simultaneously producing excess: "excessive downloads, excessive connections," "excessive "friends," excessive "contacts," "excessive speeds."[57] As many researchers have shown,[58] the negative effects of these excesses on attention, memory, and everyday cognition are too numerous to mention. Not surprisingly, the gimmicks operative in this realm create an illusion of focus and chumminess at the level of the interface by performatively creating familiarity and, therefore, also continuity. Consider the message that appears on your screen when Firefox breaks down: "Well, this is embarrassing…," which is very different from Amazon Echo's Alexa, evidently programmed—in other words: obviously automated—to circumvent questions such as "who's your mum or dad," which she answers with "I was made by a team of inventors at Amazon."[59] As with the free gift, a complex social domain is evoked by a seemingly "infra-ordinary"[60] sentence (to borrow Georges Perec's expression) like "well, this is embarrassing," lodged as it is between the neutral "something went wrong, we're working to restore your session" and the explicit in-crowd responses such as "Bob's your uncle" that some members-only websites, such as Kunstenaars & Co.[61] use to signal the help instructions' user-friendliness. The pre-corporation of elasticity 'commenting' on the unexpected rupture with the expected course of automated action is a uniquely human sentiment, since embarrassment, unlike surprise or grief (also present in most animals), is related to decorum and social class.[62] But the point here is not human-machine duality; it is *pre-corporated community*, and the retroactive performative inauguration of the system's elasticity and, therefore, also non-automated-ness. This simple quid pro quo, which creates a non-automated, seemingly socially aware existence of a browser, is the hallmark of quick comedic routines that feature prominently in human-computer interaction. The typical example is the expectedly unexpected use of certain repartees that create a chumminess borne of supposedly humorous reversals of well-known social rules or situations such as the *expectedly unexpected* use of the grumpy frog emoji, instead of a Smiley, in text conversations such as:

A: "Shall we meet tomorrow at place X?"
B: "Yes, does time Y suit you?"
A: "Yes, I'm really looking forward to this."
B: "Me too." Grumpy frog.

The 'humor' of this situation—if that's what we can call it—doesn't lie in the content of the exchange but in the reversal of expectations, or in the imitation of the classic joke rhythm: premise, premise, antithesis (in place of a synthesis)—as in the following generic example:

> I am vegetarian.
> I like my vegetables.
> With beef.

The unexpected antithesis here subverts the categorization it introduces in its initial premise, which has both an unexpectedly elastic, and a subversive working, despite the poor content of the joke. In similar fashion, the grumpy frog emoji makes use of a cliché by both upsetting the existing pattern, and affirming it. To be sure, this is not the de-stabilization of the "very structurality of [semantic] structure"[63] that subjects linear logic to infinite play in the manner of the Fluxus 'impossibly possible' *event scores*. However, it does mimic—or gimmick—its form, for example, Robert Watts's 1963 *Rain Event*, which, consisting of a single line: "by subscription only," embroils the acculturated notion of an event whose taking place can be anticipated and the un-acculturated notion of the future as non-foreseeable.[64] Or, Takehisa Kosugi's 1963 *Music for a Revolution*: "Scoop out one of your eyes 5 years from now and do the same with the other eye 5 years later,"[65] which frames the impossible within musical duration.

In semiocapitalism, where aggressive systems' optimization embroils existential territories on a daily basis, given that our digital 'homes'—Facebook; Twitter; Todoist Karma or Smarty Pig—are territories of *habit*, these micro reversals have a rhythmical, repetitive, and, therefore, also *cohesive* effect. As a temporal organization of perceived and produced events, rhythm and, in particular, easily transmittable rhythm, is key both to social cohesion and to individual physical and emotional stability. The need for being in sync with others belongs to the *primordial Erfahrung*, which doesn't refer only to human cultural traditions but includes all mammals; being in sync with others is traceable to the primates' practice of finger-drumming and imitational lip-smacking.[66] While grumpy frogs and similar quick comedic routines reinforce well-known rhythmico-social conventions—and thereby also tradition of a *biosocial* kind—there are also more personalized, more intentional forms of gimmickification. A case in point is Maciunas associate Henry Flynt's "just-likings" or "brend-ing," which re-purpose neo-avant-garde strategies by way of explicit citation.[67] Being a composite of "brand" and "trend," "brend," which first appeared in 1963, stands for a "utopian aesthetic of pure subjective enjoyment."[68] Its purpose is to cultivate "individual preferences"; a "brend" is a "'contentless model" for […] reaching a point where one's own individual "just-likings" emerge—defined as "you just like it as you do it."[69] A contemporary example of a brend, an idiosyncratic ready-made-tized "just-liking" is the use of the telephone booth sequence from the 1988 Barry Levinson film *Rain Man* as a ringtone, part of the 2010s trend of using famous film sequences as personalized ringtones.

In this particular sequence, Rainman (Raymond Babbitt, played by Dustin Hoffman), an autistic man, is waiting for his brother (Charlie Babbitt, played by Tom Cruise) to finish an important call. They are both in a phone booth. Rainman breaks wind, then repeatedly announces in a warning tone: "Uh-oh, fart!," "uh-oh, fart!" while looking for a way out of the phone booth, which he finds "very small."[70] When used as a ringtone on mobile phones, this sequence has manifold effects. Whether the phone happens to go off in the middle of a sensitive social situation or a business meeting, Hoffman's voice intoning "uh-oh, fart!" creates a double-entendre, referring to the fact that someone in

the room has broken wind, and that, surprisingly, it was Raymond Babbitt communicating from a fictive realm, who detected it. It also preempts potential criticism of the owner's omission to switch the phone off by diverting everyone's attention to a more socially embarrassing situation. Another feature of this gimmick is its use of a cultural and affective mainstay—a famous 1980s film—that reinforces the space-time of mutual recognition while simultaneously underlining the owner's dexterous use of citationality, which turns an extract from a cultural product into an audio ready-made, a neo-avant-gardist strategy par excellence. In the digital era, the various retro tendencies, abundantly present in digital culture, betray a yearning for a familiar, well-established set of rules; they also wrest time from fragmentation.[71] Restoring a sense of recognition, as well as, implicitly, stability characteristic of *Erfahrung,* such practices also create new and, often, humorous combinations of citations that characterize *Erlebnis*.

The Fetishistic Parasite

The above examples use pre-corporated practices to prompt reciprocity and experiential expansion. They also excavate past sedimentations and performative inaugurations, focus attention, create rhythmicity, repetition, and, implicitly, stability and structure. While recoding or recombining *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* in novel ways, they highlight the structural and ephemeral aspects of the digital gimmick as well as recuperate the seemingly insignificant and everyday. On the one hand, this can be seen as a continuation of the Fluxus tactics of micro-resistance that re-enchant the world sedimented *in* and *as* mainstream culture. On the other hand, it is a fetish practice, which alleviates digital oppression by installing itself as a parasite, since, in biosocial terms, the gimmick conditions the protentive-retentive circuit: it shapes future expectations on the basis of past experiences and inscriptions. Moreover, the gimmick's *formal efficacy*, its situated-ness in space, time, gadgetry, interactional modalities, and investments of energy, makes it into an *aesthetic order* sustained by refrainability and likeability. The gimmick is both infinitely reproducible, and parasitic. Yet, a parasite is never a mere 'addition' to the site or body it occupies. Rather, it is trebly excessive: internal *and* external, present *and* absent, affirmed *and* disavowed.[72] By parasitizing the digital sphere, the gimmick both re-establishes the stratigraphy of experience and accelerates its atrophy. This is very similar to Benjamin's excessive, non-binary notion of barbarism, which designates the desecration of physical, socio-economic, and moral experience, *as well as* a fresh start: "Our poverty of experience is not merely poverty on the personal level, but poverty of human experience in general. Hence, a new kind of barbarism. Barbarism? Yes, indeed [...] a new, positive concept of barbarism."[73]

Yet, we have, since Benjamin's time, entered a vortex of abstraction far removed from the fecund ambiguity of positivity and negativity. As the authors of *Financial Derivatives and the Globalization of Risk,* Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee, explain, and Jameson reinstates in his discussion of the cultural gimmick, the ambivalent—and, we could add, fetishistic and barbaric—nature of the digital gimmick is strikingly similar to the post-2008 financial instrument called the derivative. An insurance for the continuously fluctuating rates of exchange, the derivative is by default outsourced to artificial intelligence, which breaks a complex task like: "provide ten million cell phones to a South-African firm" into: outsource the "interior architecture of the device" to a German-Italian enterprise; outsource "casings" to a Mexican manufacturer; outsource the manufacture of all other components to a Japanese firm, then underwrite the different currencies and their fluctuating exchange rates.[74] Because of its complexity, the derivative is a one-off, non-durable solution, inapplicable to other

contexts. Surprisingly, however, since the 2008 financial meltdown, the derivative has played a role "parallel to that played by gold in the nineteenth century" given that, in a system of *continually oscillating* currencies, the derivative, as a "unique and momentarily definitive combination of those currency values," acts as a "new standard of value and thereby a new Absolute."[75] It creates stability from fluctuation and variability at a level diametrically opposed to the "infra-ordinary" and the everyday: the level of the "supra-human," which bypasses human consciousness.[76] While the judo throw stood for a tactical advantage playfully gained in a dynamic situation of constantly changing positions and relationships, the digital gimmick stands for an essentially indeterminate ecosystem where adaptive algorithms, learning from a vast number of other algorithms, distort epistemic, biosocial, and economic realities within milliseconds[77] making the distinction between "chance," "goal-orientation," "tactic, "strategy," "play," and "value" obsolete, as well as erasing the difference between "fleeting," "durable," "ephemeral," and "structural." Should we see this as a definitive sign of doom? Perhaps this is a different kind of flux.

Notes

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7 Ibid., 86.
8 Ibid., 57.
9 Allan Kaprow in Benjamin H.D. Buchloch and Judith F Rodenbeck, *Experiments in the Everyday* (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Walalch Art Gallery and Columbia University, 1999), 76.
10 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative?* (New York: Zero Books, 2009), 4.
11 Victor Turner, "Social Dramas and Ritual Metaphors," in *Ritual, Play and Performance Readings in The Social Sciences/Theatre,* eds. Richard Schechner and Mandy Schuman (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), 113.
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13 Gary S. Cross, *Time and Money: The Making of Consumer Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993), 76.
14 Ken Friedman, *The Aesthetics* (Devon: Beau Geste Press, 1972), np.
15 This neologism refers to the practice of turning everyday objects into ready-mades and transferring them to the realm of aesthetic experience, like Marcel Duchamp's seminal 1917 *Fountain*, which was a urinal.
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18 Andreas Huyseen, "Back to the Future," in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, eds. Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss (Minneapolis: Walker Arts Center, 1993), 150.

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20 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 9; emphasis in original.
21 Joseph B. Pine and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy Work is Theatre & Every Business is a Stage* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), 24.
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27 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 27.
28 Byung-Chul Han, *The Scent of Time*, trans. Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 1-2.
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31 Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 44.
32 Ibid.
33 For more information about the Mail Order catalogues, see Natasha Lushetich, *Fluxus: The Practice of Non-Duality* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014).
34 Usually considered to be until 1978, the year of George Maciunas's death.
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36 OED, 2014, https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/, accessed November 3, 2019.
37 Alfred A. Arth and Lucille M. Freeman, "The Gimmick as an Instructional Tool," *Middle School Journal* 13, no. 1 (1981): 6.
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40 Ibid., 471.
41 Fredric Jameson, "The Aesthetics of Singularity," *New Left Review* 2 (March-April 2015): 113-4.
42 Ibid., 113.

43 See Natasha Lushetich, "A Santa with a Butt Plug: Paul McCarthy and the Obliterating Violence of Positivity," *Body, Space & Technology* 19, no. 1 (2020), http://doi.org/10.16995/bst.340.
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